

Tower Hobbies

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You can find remote control planes, boats, cars, and more at the world's largest hobby distributor, Hobbico. The company that made this possible was Tower Hobbies, a dream transformed into reality. Tower Hobbies was started by Bruce Holecek who faced the many things that make a business.

Tower Hobbies started in 1971 in Champaign, Illinois. The name Tower Hobbies came from the name of Holeceks's dorm, Illini Towers, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Holecek got the idea of starting the company from a friend. One day when he was thinking back to his childhood, Holecek went to the hobby store and bought a little wooden model airplane. He put it together, painted it, then lit the aircraft on fire and threw it off his balcony. His friend saw this and they went back to the hobby store to buy more airplanes. When they were finished constructing the planes, lighting them on fire, and throwing them off the balcony, Holecek's friend told him that he should open up his own hobby shop and sell airplanes and hobby supplies. Holecek must have liked the idea and he started his company in his dorm room.

Some of the first hobby products Tower Hobbies sold were wooden airplane kits and glue. The company did not custom make any of its products at first, but instead it only distributed hobby products. During the first two years, the employees were Bruce Holecek, his brother Mark, and his newly wedded wife, Jeri. It was a small company but it grew quickly.

Holecek set big goals for his beginning company. He sought to charge his consumers with low prices. He wanted to offer high quality but affordable hobby products, and he wanted his customers to buy from Tower Hobbies repeatedly. Holecek had other ambitions too, including good service. He hoped to have his employees keep a “customers are kings” attitude, and he desired that every customer be satisfied. Another objective he had was to have his company be the top mail order distributor of hobby products. In fact, his company grew to become the largest mail order hobby distributor in the world.

Holecek was extremely dedicated to Tower Hobbies and was determined that it succeed. He used all his \$800 in savings to start his hobby distributing company. Even when his products sold, he recycled the profits back into Tower Hobbies. He also gave up most of his pleasures for it. Before starting, he had always enjoyed playing games and hanging around in bars, but afterwards, he found that these pleasures were too expensive for the meager amount he was receiving from the university. Holecek said, “We ate, breathed, slept, talked, and dreamed about nothing but Tower Hobbies.” Holecek wrote that Tower Hobbies started with a dream, “A dream that grew into a reality beyond my wildest expectations.”

All of Holecek’s hard work paid off. Tower Hobbies evolved into Hobbico, a company with four divisions: Tower Hobbies, Great Planes Distributors, Hobbico Product, and Hobbico Administration. Hobbico is now the number one hobby distributor in the world. It has around seven hundred employees and it makes \$20 million in annual sales. Hobbico is always striving to have the best service and to get their customers what they want. [From “Career Opportunities,” Hobbico, Dec. 11, 2005; Bruce Holecek, “The

History of Tower Hobbies,” Tower Hobbies, Dec. 11, 2005; student historian’s interview with Bruce Holecek, Nov. 22, 2005; and student historian’s interview with Rick Piester, Nov. 18, 2005.]